



H.M.S. Amethyst

The civil war between Mao Tse Tung's Communists People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) was in progress in 1949, the Communists were slowly squeezing the KMT into South China. Britain had stationed a guard ship at Nanking to protect British lives and property.

In April 1949, HMS AMETHYST was scheduled to relieve HMS CONSORT as guard ship. The PLA were fast approaching the north bank of the Yangtze, and the changeover might have to take place with the ships steaming between the opposing armies. It was judged safe for AMETHYST to proceed up river to relieve CONSORT, and she sailed from Shanghai, then in KMT hands, on 19 April for the nail biting passage up the Yangtze between the guns of the two opposing armies.

Over half way to Nanking, AMETHYST came under heavy artillery fire, was hit and driven aground. Twenty-One Officers and men were killed and twenty-eight wounded.

CONSORT sailed from Nanking and attempted to help AMETHYST but she came under devastating fire, crippled, she managed to escape down river. Some of AMETHYST's crew were landed to reduce casualties from the continuing gunfire.

HM Ships LONDON and BLACK SWAN were then sailed up the Yangtze to assist, but they too came under fire and were forced to retire. AMETHYST managed to refloat after 15 hours aground and under PLA fire which she was unable to return. Whenever she moved she came under fire. The Chinese Nationalists arranged the evacuation of the wounded to shore. AMETHYST remained trapped in the Yangtze until the end of July. Twenty-five men were killed in CONSORT and LONDON, and many more were wounded. The Chinese lost over 250 men killed.

Extensive negotiations took place with the Communists to obtain the release of AMETHYST. Life on board AMETHYST was extremely Spartan, during the 3 months she was held captive by threatening PLA artillery, due to damage, heat and lack of ventilation in the summer weather and due to the shortage of stores.

During early summer the KMT had been pushed out of China and withdrew to Taiwan.

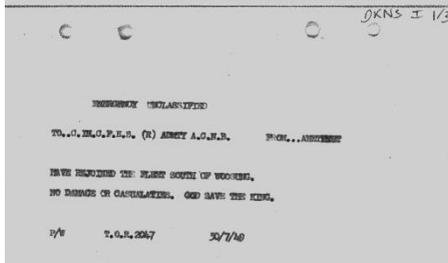
Eventually AMETHYST concluded negotiations were getting nowhere and on 30 July she decided to break out, slipped her anchor and made a dramatic escape at night down the river. On escaping from the river AMETHYST made the often-quoted signal "***Have rejoined the Fleet South of Woosung. No damage or casualties. God Save the King.***" AMETHYST's escape and her subsequent return to UK caught the imagination of the British People and received world-wide publicity.

A film, several books and TV documentaries have been produced describing this incident. Accounts of the escape are still regularly published in the UK national press.

Three DSOs, 1 MBE, 4 DSCs, 1 DFC, 7 DSMs and many Mentions in Despatches were awarded as a result of this Incident. Simon, the ships cat of HMS AMETHYST was awarded the Animals VC, the Dicken Medal.



Sailors on board HMS Jamaica cheer HMS Amethyst as she passes on 1 August 1949.



"Have re-joined the Fleet South of Woosung. No damage or casualties. God Save the King."



Able Seacat Simon D.M., R.N.

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The Four Ships

HMS Consort (right) &
HMS London (below)



HMS Black Swan (above)
& HMS Amethyst (left)

The Yangtze Incident 1949

Historical Note

Kindly provided by

Lt. Commander Stewart Hett, M.B.E., R.N. (Retd)

President of the Amethyst Association.



